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**Fifteen Questions**  
TOUCHING  
**CHURCH**  
**GOVERNMENT,**

Clandestinely purposed to, but publicly answered

B Y

**Rob. Howson M.A.**

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**MINISTER**

Of the TOWN and COUNTY of POOLE;

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THE

GOVERNMENT

OF THE

MINISTERS

OF THE

*Fifteen Questions Proposed to, and Answer'd by Mr. Robert  
Howson Master of Arts, and Minister of Gods Word in  
POOLE.*

1 Q. **W**Hether it be not the duty of every Christian, to choose the Communion of the best Society; and whether in the choice thereof? He is bound to follow his own judgment, after the best Information he is able to attain unto, or other Mens Judgments against his own 2 Cor. 6. c. 7. v.

1 A. *There is no Man can judge so far of Mens Persons, or humane Societies, as to say such are good, or such are bad; the Pharisees were accounted by themselves, and others the best of Men, while indeed they were the worst. Mat. 23. from the 13th v. and the Publicans (who were accounted the worst of Men) are said to go into the Kingdom of Heaven before them; Men are good or bad in themselves toward God, so far only as their Natures are renewed, and as they are transformed into the Image of God: And they are good and bad to us, so far as they walk according to, or differing from the Word of God, the most visible and certain rule of a Christian Conversation.*

2 Q. Whether it be not the duty of every Christian, to withdraw from every Brother that walks disorderly, not after the Traditions received from the Apostles, 2 Thess. 3. c. 6. v.

2 A. *It is so? Therefore every Man or every Society of Men, that maintain erroneous Principles, or live in Vicious or Wicked Practices, are to be separated from, and punished by the Power that Christ hath given to his Church under the Gospel, 1 Cor. 5. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Mat. 18. 17.*

3 Q. Whether it be not Incongruous and Heterogenial, to punish corporally, Men erring spiritually, 2 Tim. 2. c. 24, 25. v.

3 A. *If after all meekness and aptness to teach and patience there meant: The erring Brother will rather refuse to hear, or continue to oppose; the punishing of the Body may conduce to the saving of the Soul, 1 Cor. 5. 5. Gold and Dross are Heterogenial, yet the fire separates between them, according to the Philosophical Maxim, Ignis separat Heterogenea, & congregat Homogenea.*

4 Q. Whether secular force and compulsion in things of Divine and Supernatural Revelation, be the way of Christ to compleat his Church, or whether his People be not a willing People in the days of his Power. 11 Psalm. 3. v.

5 Q. Whether any one can be compell'd by secular force or compulsion, to perform any one Religious duty acceptably, since God accepts not of any, but what is voluntary and of Faith, which cannot be forc'd and of what use then is secular force and compulsion in Religion, but to make Men Sin or Suffer, and as for those words usually urged out of that Parable: go forth and compel them to come in, 14. Luke 23. I pray Sir consider they that were invited and slighted this kindness shown, where they were compell'd: And those that it is said they should compell, show that they refused: And I pray deal ingeniously, and tell me whether that compulsion was any other than by setting before them the benefits offered, and so compelling them by force of Argument.

4 and 5 A. *Though secular force and compulsion do not perswade Mens minds, or perfect Christs Church; yet it doth and may bring Men unto those Gospel and Spiritual means (which by the assistance of the Spirit) may effectually perswade and save. School Boys are whipt to School, and yet for all that many of them do love their business and like there books, and have cause to bless God they ever were forc'd and compell'd: when I was in my Youthful Age, fear of Punishment did force me to those Ordinances, in which I found and felt much good, and for which I shall have cause to be eternally thankful; and I do more than believe that many have (by force off Ecclesiastical censures) been brought to a Communion with our Church, in which they have experienced much of Gods grace and goodness, and for which they are now magnifying his Name and Spirit.*

6 Q. Whether Christs Rule to his Disciples under the Gospel, be not a Spiritual Power, and whether to use the Temporal Sword in Religious matters, be not to make the Weapons of the Gospel not mighty through God, according to that in 2 Cor. 10. 3, 4, 5. But mighty through the Majestrates Power, and to arm the Church with Weapons, Christ never gave her, and to make her rather a Military, than a Spiritual Society.

7 Q. Whether to say the Spiritual Power Christ hath given to the Church, for the right ordering and governing thereof, is not sufficient for that end, without the aid and assistance of Secular Power be not to Blaspheme.

6 and 7 A. Under the Gospel the Spiritual Rule of Christ, is to Govern his Church by his Spirit, and word, and the only weapons of the Church are Prayers and Tears, and not Guns and Swords, such as were most shamefully used by the Dissenters from our Church (to the great scandal of Religion) in the late Bloody Tragedy of our National and Civil war, which ended in the most barbarous Catastrophy; viz. the spilling of the best Blood that ever circled in meer humane Veins. As to the Temporal Sword you spake of, at worst 'tis but a Rod of Church Discipline, such as the Apostle taught and order'd to be used. 1 Cor. 5. 5. c. 4. 21. v. And that not in opposition to the great Law and Rule of the Spirit, in things Spiritual and Essential to Salvation, but in great Subordination to that Law, and to that Rule.

If the Spirit of God under Gospel dispensations, work upon Mens Hearts and Consciences by the outward means of Prayer, hearing the word Preached and Sacraments (as you will certainly own) why then that Law and Power, that enjoyns and commands attendance in these, is in subordination to the Law of the Spirit, and is both lawful and necessary, especially if you do but consider, the Atheism and Profaneness, as well as the Faction and Giddiness of the Age; so that not to use this Power, in such an Age would be in some sence to Blaspheme the Legislative and Executive Power of Christ in his Church.

8 Q. Whether to force and compell Men in the Worship and Service of God, to act against their lights and judgments be not a Spiritual Rape upon their Consciences.

8 A. The Spiritual Rape you talk of is committed by your selves, upon your own understandings, who deny to hear Christian light and liberty so plainly preach'd and proved, that wholly removes all occasion of that force you spake of, to all candid and unprejudiced Hearers.

9 Q. Whether it be not the duty of all Christians to walk together, so far as they have attained, and in other things wait the Revelation of the mind of God, to them that differ Phil. 2. 15. 16.

9 A. It is undoubtedly the duty of all Christians, having attained the knowledge of the Gospel, to walk together in Gospel Communion, and not to make Schisms and Separations Ro. 16. 17. Heb. 10. 25.

*And to that Scripture you spake of in Phil. 2. 15. 16. it is altogether alien to your purpose.*

10 Q. Whether in those duties whereon Eternity depends, it be not the highest absurdity to force any against there own light, to be guided by others who are not Infallible.

10 A. *It is rather the highest absurdity in the world, for any Man in the great concern of Eternity, to trust to his own light, especially when he hath an Infallible Light to be guided by, viz. the Scriptures Preach'd and Explained, Read Isaiah 8. 17. 18. 19. 20.*

11 Q. Whether it be not most unreasonable in the Concerns of Eternity, to tie Men by temporal Penalty to fallible guides, whom to follow may be their Eternal Ruin, to forsake their temporal ruin.

11 A. *I deny the supposition, Our Church doth not tie Men (as you suppose) to any fallible Guide, but only to the Infallible Spirit and word which guideth: and to the Church which is guided according to truth.*

12 Q. Whether are they who separate, or who gives the cause of Separation the Schismatics.

12 A. *They who give the cause of separation are the greatest separatists, but such as separate when and where there is no cause given are as great as the greatest separatist and altogether unexcusable.*

13 Q. Whether they who in the Exercise of Church Discipline, never leave calling on the Civil Magistrat, to assist him with his secular Force, do not herein give an evident sign and token, that all true Ministerial and Spiritual Power is dead in them.

13 A. *I know no such Men now, as those you speak of; but I have heard, and read, of those who in the late wars: have (in their Pulpits with a Stentorian clamour) called to come to the help of the Lord against the Mighty; meaning the King and Church; who I suppose were Ministers of the Authors Complexion.*

14 Q. Whether since Offences will come, it be not every ones concern to be more than ordinarily careful, he involves not himself in the dreadful Woe pronounced against those by whom they come, Mat. 13. 7.

14 A. *Woe be to them, who by their Obstinacy and Disobedience give Offence to lawfull Governours and Government.*

15 Q. Whether can any think, that they who persecute Chur-

in his Members, dispoiling them in their Goods, Imprisoning of their Persons, and that for their faithful adhering to the plain and undoubted commands of their Heavenly Sovereign will speed better at the great Day of account; then those whom Christ himself hath told us, shall be then Rejected for not relieving his Poor Members, when in wants, in sickness, or in any other Adversities, *Mat. 25. 41. 42. 43.*

15. A. I deny your Hypothesis; and I do affirm that there is no such Persecution as you suppose, if there be any thing like Persecution at this time among us, it is that of the tongue, shooting bitter and sharp Arrows against sober and painful conforming Ministers; who by life, and love, and labour, would convince and persuade Gain-sayers to God and his Church, and would use no other means.

Sir, You did lately in an earnest manner in your Sermon intreat Persons candidly to reason things with you, and said if any one saw you in an error, they should give you warning, and not suffer you to go on in sin, wherefore pray accept of this in Love, and consider it well for it is intended for your good, and done without any Reflection or evil thought of the present Government according to that in *Tim. 2. 1, 2. v. and 1 Pet. 2. 17. I Say God save the King, Amen.*

A. The last part of your last Question I own, and should be glad to know your name and the place of your abode, that I may receive if possible some greater satisfaction from your Person then I have from your Paper. In the mean time, pray Sir if these following Questions may find you, be pleased to return your Answer.

1 Q. Whether the Church of England as establish'd by Law, be a Lawful Church, and if you think this be a *Noli me tangere.* Pray then.

2 Q. Were not the Martyrs in Queen Mary's days, Members of this Church, and had not those Martyrs great Supplies and Supports from God.

3 Q. Whether God would give such Supplies and Supports to any, but to such as were Members of a Good and Lawfull Church.

4 Q. Whether it be not extremely sinfull to separate from such a Church; which have had such Members, so Supported and so Supplied by Gods Good Spirit.

5 Q. Whether if those Martyrs did suffer Persecution in those days, for Owning and Receiving the Sacraments in the External Elements of Bread and Wine, it be not a contradiction, that such as are now by Law forc'd to that plain duty, should be looked upon as Persecuted Lambs and Martyrs. Since 'tis the Cause and not the Suffering that makes a Martyr.

6 Q. Whether Damnation for Relisting the higher Powers, mentioned in *Rom. 13. 2.* be not the same, if not worse than that Damnation we read of in *Cor. 1. 11. 29.*

7 Q. And by consequence not to obey the Command of Authority be not as great a Sin, as to Receive the Sacrament Unworthily.

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